

**An Investigation on Grammatical and Lexical Problems in the
English-Chinese Document Translation
in the United Nations**

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Abstract

For many years, the United Nations has been one of the major employers of professional translators and interpreters. Despite a great deal of translation work is being done in the UN on a daily basis, few systematic research has been conducted so far on this important translation practice. To set the ball rolling, this paper focuses on the problems and challenges that exist in current UN English-Chinese document translation practice. Through detailed analysis on the examples collected from the official UN document system, this paper is trying to investigate the major grammatical and lexical problems that influence the readability of UN translations and the translation strategies adopted by UN translators. The literal translation approach will be given special attention as it is the dominant strategy in document translation. It is hoped that the findings of this paper will throw new light on the UN document translation study so that document translation theories could be developed and in turn serve translation practice.

Key words: translation, document translation, literal translation, the United Nations.

Chapter 1 Introduction

In translation practice and theoretical studies, document translation seems to draw less attention compared with literary translation. Less research and thinking has been done on document translation to investigate its problems, challenges, translation strategies and so on, though it is a more pragmatic translation activity, in today's world in particular. The same holds true of document translation in the United Nations (hereafter "UN"). Although piles of different types of documents are being translated into different languages in the UN every day, so far no systematic research has been done into this important translation practice, except some general discussion by "in-house" UN translators (Wagner, Bech & Martinez, 2002). For this reason, this paper is intended to conduct research in this regard to set the ball rolling. Due to limited time and space, this paper will focus on English-Chinese translation activities in the UN, trying to specify the grammatical and lexical problems existing in current translation practice.

Since its founding in 1945, the UN has played a significant role in tackling international issues and coordinating inter-state relations. Sixty five years after the Second World War, no one will doubt the dominant and irreplaceable position the UN is holding in today's ever-changing world. As a family of 192 members, the first thing it needs to solve is the problem of communication between member countries. Although English has the potential to become the lingua franca of today's world, it is also a fact that many countries have taken steps to increase the number of materials

written in their own national languages (United Nations, 1976). As a result, translation and interpretation departments are essential to make the organization function smoothly and effectively.

As the official UN document system now is open to the public, anyone can get access to all the documents published by the UN as long as he or she is connected to the internet. A substantial part of these documents are published multilingually which provides us with an opportunity to get a closer look at the translation practice of this international organization.

Currently, there are six official languages in the UN, which are English, French, Spanish, Russian, Chinese and Arabic. Every official language has a translation office affiliated with the documentation department of the Secretariat. In addition, there is also a German translation department. The official policy on language processing is that all the official languages have equal status and are processed on the basis of complete parity (Cassar: 1995), which means no document is released until it is available in all six languages (Dollerup, 2000).

With the increase of the economic and political influence of China, the demand for translation between English and Chinese is dramatically increasing accordingly. Due to the huge differences between Chinese and other European languages, translators working in the Chinese language department not only need to translate documents written in other official languages into Chinese, but also need to do translation work from Chinese into other language. Since 2005, all the translators working in the Chinese section are from Mainland China (Liu, 2007). As at least 90%

of all original documents are written in English (Dollerup, 2000), a substantial part of the work of the Chinese language department is to translate documents from English into Chinese, while translating documents written in Chinese into other languages only accounts for a very small proportion of the total workload (Xu, 2009). Therefore this project will focus on English/Chinese translation.

After decades of practice, document translation in the UN is of a very high quality. As Cassar mentioned in his paper, most of the problems and difficulties translators working in large organizations encounter – impossible deadlines, poorly drafted manuscripts, cumbersome institutional vocabulary and jargon, etc – are being tackled in the UN (Cassar: 1995). For instance, over the years, the UN documentation department has been working on the unified writing standards and a great deal of training has been done for document drafters to improve their writing towards a clear and succinct direction. The advent of new technologies has also greatly facilitated translators' work. The introduction of strong databases and translation software has reduced the percentage of mistakes and the burden of repetition work substantially.

However, this does not mean that translation practice in the UN is a perfect model of document translation, far from it. For an international organization like the UN, accuracy is the first priority of its document translation. As a result, literal translation has become the dominant translation strategy adopted by document translators of the UN. This has brought some serious problems in terms of the readability of the translated documents. Let us take English-Chinese translation in the UN as an example. To be frank, as a reader, reading these translated Chinese documents is not

always a pleasant experience. From time to time, one can come across some grammatical but unacceptable sentences.

Another problem is that documentation translation in the UN has formulated a set of norms over the decades (Cao & Zhao, 2006). “It may not always appear the best possible, but to stay in it may be a convenient way of averting a resumption of debate” – this is a comment from W. H. Hindle about the writing style of the UN (Hindle, 1984: 3) which also, in my view, applies to the translation of UN documentation. To a large extent, what the translated document looks like depends on how the original document is written. Although UN document writers are trying not to overburden their colleagues in the translation department by avoiding loose phrases and murky words (Hindle, 1984), still much needs to be done.

Being aware of the above issues, this paper will try to identify the challenges and problems that UN documentation translation is facing, what strategies have been adopted by UN translators to address these issues and whether these are the best solutions for readers and the organization’s sake. It is believed that, as one of the world major employers of professional translators and interpreters for many years, UN’s “experience in translation, both positive and negative, can provide important insight and lessons for translators, translation organizations and translation educational institutions” (Cao & Zhao, 2006: xi).

In the following chapter, previous research on document translation and UN’s translation practice will be reviewed as well as the relevant translation theories. Chapter 3 will focus on the methodology that is used in this research. Based on the

data collected from the UN document system, detailed analysis will be presented in Chapter 4 from the perspectives of grammar and lexicality. In the last chapter, conclusions will be given according to the analysis of Chapter 4. In addition, the limitations of this paper and possible future research directions will be considered.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter will focus on the review of previous studies on the main areas of scholarship this paper is covering. In Section 2.1, a general review of studies on literal and other translation strategies will be presented. Section 2.2 will focus on review of previous studies with regard to reader-oriented and source text-oriented translation. Text type studies relevant to translation strategies will be reviewed in Section 2.3. Finally, Section 2.4 will summarize the previous comments from in-house UN translators.

2.1 Literal translation vs other translation strategies

There is no doubt that literal translation is the ideal way to effect the transformation between languages if the translated text is consistent with the source text, sounds natural and makes sense to the target reader. As Newmark wrote (Newmark 1981: 39):

In communicative as in semantic translation, provided that equivalent effect is secured, the literal word-for-word translation is not only the best, it is the only valid method of translation.

Although a variety of translation strategies have been developed over decades, literal translation still holds a strong position in translating documents, especially legal documents which are very similar to UN documents with regard to their characteristics such as accuracy, authoritativeness, etc. As Sarcevic pointed out (Sarcevic 1997: 16):

Legal translators have traditionally been bound by the principle of fidelity. Convinced that the main goal of legal translation is to reproduce the content of the source text as accurately as possible, both lawyers and linguists agreed that legal texts had to be translated literally.

It is obvious that accuracy is the paramount element in document translation.

According to Xu Yanan, director of the Chinese translation section in the UN, document translation in the UN has a higher requirement on accuracy compared with fluency (Xu, 2009). Sin, an expert in legal translation also emphasizes the importance of accuracy over fluency. He holds that accuracy prevails over easy reading where both aims are in conflict during legal translation (Sin 1998:203).

Unfortunately, in reality, literal translation cannot address all the problems and challenges that arise in the course of translation and translators have to seek other supplementary translation approaches to realize equivalence. This is particularly true in English/Chinese translation which must take into account the huge differences existing between the two languages. For instance, finding suitable equivalent terms that represent and convey the original meanings in the SL is a major difficulty in legal document translation between English and Chinese (Cao, 2002). In this case, various strategies such as the use of contextual clues, lexical expansion and compensation, borrowing or creating new words, should be used to cope with these problems (Cao, 2002).

2.2 Reader-oriented vs Source text-oriented translation

The essence of the debate on translation strategies lies in whether the translation should be reader-oriented or ST-oriented. As literal translation is regarded as the

dominant strategy adopted in document translation, most of this type of translation should firstly be faithful to the original text, namely the ST. The task of the translator is to “remain true to the ST and to approximate it as closely as possible with his translation” (Rayar 1988: 542). Schleiermacher is also an advocator of ST-oriented translation. He proposed two translation strategies – “either the translator leaves the writer alone as much as possible and moves the reader toward the writer, or he [sic] leaves the reader alone as much as possible and moves the writer toward the reader” (Schleiermacher 1813/1992: 41-2). He himself sees the first strategy as more creative by breathing new life into the language (1813/1992: 38). Later on, this strategy was developed into the “foreignization” approach by Venuti. Foreignization avoids fluency and invisibility: aspects of the SL are conveyed despite a lack of naturalness (Venuti, 1995).

ST-oriented translation, however, does not have the support of all theorists. In fact, many tend to put more emphasis on readers rather than the ST. As Nida’s famous “Dynamic equivalence” (Nida, 1964) theory says, the translated message has to be tailored to the receptor’s linguistic needs and cultural expectation and aims at complete naturalness of expression (Munday, 2001). Or as Luther claimed, “you must ask the mother at home, the children in the street, the ordinary man in the market and look at their mouths, how they speak, and translate that way; then they’ll understand” (Munday, 2001). No matter whether Luther’s view is right or wrong, honestly speaking, his translation approach seems to be a mission impossible in document translation.

As some other scholars have pointed out, in reality, translators often feel a need to switch from ST orientation to reader orientation and back again within the same text (Hjort-Pedersen, 1996).

2.3 Text types relevant to translation strategies

After the early stage of “word-for-word” or “sense-for-sense” argument, later translation theorists began to distinguish different types of texts when discussing translation strategies. Schleiermacher identified two different types of translators doing two different types of text: those who translate commercial texts are trying to move the writer toward the reader; while those who translate scholarly and artistic texts tend to move the reader toward the writer (Munday 2001: 27-28). After him, Katharine Reiss created a “triangle” to categorize texts into three different types – informative, expressive and operative. Each type has its own focus; accordingly, translation methods adopted in the three types of texts should be “plain prose”, “identifying” and “adaptive” respectively. However, as some texts may have multiple functions or purposes, there is no absolutely strict division. According to Li, translation can also be divided into literary translation which refers to the translation of fiction, poetry, drama and prose, and non-literary translation which refers to the translation of argumentative, explanatory, narrative and practical writings (Li, 2004).

It is true that text type is the central defining element in choosing translation strategies. In literary translation, for example, literal translation perhaps is a translator’s last resort. With regard to UN documentation, there are six major

categories: documents for or from its principal organs and subsidiary organs, official records, publications other than official records, journals, public information materials and non-symbol papers (Cao & Zhao, 2006). Some of the UN documents are of a general nature; some are highly technical; occasionally, some speeches may also contain a literary flavor (Cao & Zhao, 2006). However, in Cao & Zhao's point of view, generally speaking, translation in the UN is a type of technical translation.

What is worth mentioning is that the selection of translation method depends on far more than just text types. Other elements such as the translator's own role, purpose and sociocultural pressures, also have an effect on the translation strategies adopted (Munday 2001: 76). Translation studies cannot be done with text and process being separated. As Neubert and Shreve have noted, the translation process is defined by both texts and their situation. Translation is "an intersection of situation, translator competence, source text, and target text-to-be" (Neubert and Shreve, 1992: 5). Therefore, the study on UN English/Chinese translation should focus not only on text analysis but also other variables and the overall context of the translation process.

2.4 In-house comments on document translation in big international organizations

Over the years, translation activities have been practiced on a large scale in big international organizations like the UN and the European Union. However, there were no monographs published that focused on this specific translation area until Wagner, Bech and Martinez's *Translating for the European Union Institutions* came out in 2002. Four years later, Cao and Zhao followed suit and published *Lian he guo wen*

jian fan yi (*Translation at the United Nations*) which examines English/Chinese translation practice in the UN. All the authors mentioned above are working or used to work for these international organizations as translators. They therefore discuss translation in a more practical rather than theoretical way.

Both of the books above cover a wide range of contents revealing translation activities “behind the curtain”. In the first book, the authors discuss why they translate, what types of documents EU translators translate, problems they encounter, how to become an EU translator, as well as the roles of the EU institutions and their translation services (Wagner, Bech & Martinez, 2002). Overall, this book drew a comprehensive picture of the EU translation practice and will serve all translators and theorists as a valuable and in-depth reference. Similarly, Cao and Zhao’s book also makes a significant contribution to the research on document translation, especially English/Chinese translation. In their book, different types of UN documents and translation strategies adopted are presented with a large number of examples coming from the existing UN documents.

With regard to the problems existing in document translation, both books mentioned that cultural barriers, poor quality of original drafts, institutional gobbledygook, deadlines and non-transferability of concepts are the major sources of difficulties (Wagner, Bech & Martinez, 2002; Cao & Zhao, 2006).

Besides the two monographs, there are a few papers and interviews from in-house UN translators discussing a variety of practical problems in document translation. Michel Gainet, director of the Translation and Editorial Division (retired), pointed out

that one of the challenges for UN translators is that they have to translate documents from different domains and cannot specialize, although “strong legal and engineering backgrounds are great assets”. Stephen Sekel, Chief of the English Translation Service, worried about the personnel cuts in language services which means more translations will be contracted out. Although most of the contract translators are former UN employees or translators, still their work needs to be monitored to guarantee the consistency and a high quality of translation. Ana Maria Willumsen from the Spanish Translation Service predicted that more computer-aided translation and more technological innovation including voice recognition system will be introduced into the UN; but the UN will not force its staff to use it. (Dollerup, 2000: 12-16)

All in all, translation practice in the UN is a dynamic process which is influenced by multiple factors and is changing constantly. As UN documents cover a range of different types, it would be interesting to see what kinds of different translation strategies are being adopted by UN translators accordingly. Furthermore, as achieving maximum accuracy is the most important criterion of UN translation, should literal translation be put on the first place when it comes to document translation? What are the other approaches that should also be considered by UN translators so as to improve the readability of the translated documents? All these questions will be examined in this paper through the analysis of concrete examples.

Chapter 3 Methodology

Thanks to the Official Document System of the United Nations (“ODS”), nowadays people can easily get access to all types of official UN documentation from 1993 in a full-text form in all official languages. At the same time, older UN documents are added to the system on a daily basis. ODS also provides access to the resolutions of the General Assembly, Security Council, Economic and Social Council and the Trusteeship Council from 1946 onwards (United Nations). As this paper focuses on problems and challenges existing in English/Chinese translation in the UN, all the data being analyzed in this paper come from ODS.

As mentioned before, most of the Chinese translations in the UN are of a very high standard, accurate, fluent and easy to read. However, there are also some parts in those translated documents which are not reader-friendly or have grammatical problems. This is the material which is targeted as the main source of data for this paper. All the examples of problem translations have both an English version and a Chinese version in ODS and all of them are translated from English into Chinese. The selection of documents is random; however, a variety of document types are covered in the course of data-collecting, including reports, draft reports, decisions, resolutions, notes, statements, letters, official records, etc. Moreover, to reflect the most up-to-date translation problems and challenges of the UN translation, all the data are selected from the UN documents released from 2009 onwards.

Altogether, fifty problem sentences are collected for the purpose of this research. The reasons that make these sentences problematic can be various, from lexical level to cultural element. As accuracy is the most significant criterion of UN document translation, it is extremely important that these translations are correct lexically and grammatically. Based on the above consideration, the thesis will analyze the data from two perspectives: lexical and grammatical.

3.1 Categorization of translation problems

3.11 Grammatical problems

Preliminary data analysis has suggested that grammatical problems arising from UN document translation fall into three categories as follows:

- ◆ Translation of attributive and adverbial clause/phrase
- ◆ Translation of passive voice
- ◆ Translating nouns into verbs

3.12 Lexical problems

Preliminary data analysis has suggested that lexical problems in UN document translation can be found in the following three situations:

- ◆ The use of four-word set phrases
- ◆ How to deal with the “no-equivalent-word” situation
- ◆ Translation of proper nouns

Data will be analyzed to test these categories and extra categories will be added as appropriate.

3.2 Method for data analysis

Based on the collected data, problems existing in UN's English/Chinese translation will be analyzed through specific examples; different translation strategies adopted by UN translators will be assessed to see why they choose certain strategies and whether these strategies lead to good translation or bad translation.

As literal translation still serves as the dominant translation strategy in document translation, this paper will particularly pay attention to this approach to see whether it is the best solution in UN document translation so far, and to what extent it has hampered the transmission and the understanding of information. A literal translation is "a translation that follows closely the form of the source language", also known as "word-for-word translation" (Larson 1984). In translation studies however, literal translation has the meaning of "technical translation of scientific, technical, technological or legal texts" (Classe, 2000). In this paper, literal translation will be reviewed based on the latter meaning.

Analysis of each example will conclude with a discussion of alternative translation versions and/or suggestions for improvement of the translation based on comparison with other translation strategies.

Apart from text-based analysis, other variables relevant to the choice of translation strategies and the final translation products will also be discussed in this paper, including political and cultural elements, text types, as well as for whom the UN documents are translated.

Based on the analysis in Chapter 4, it is hoped that the research questions raised

at the beginning of the paper can be answered in the conclusion chapter to find out what are the major lexical and grammatical problems in UN document translation, whether literal translation is a good practice and how literal translation can be combined with other translation methods to produce better results.

As this paper focuses on the current problems of UN document translation and the strategies adopted, the results of it can serve as a reference for the UN's English/Chinese translation practice and help UN translators to be more aware of their existing problems and work harder to avoid them in future translations. As for translation in general, this paper can serve as a case study of document translation and find out how literal translation can function better as an important strategy in document translation.

Chapter 4 Data Analysis

In this chapter, grammatical and lexical challenges and solutions in documentation translation in the UN will be analyzed through concrete examples based on the methodology described in the previous chapter.

4.1 Grammatical challenges:

4.1.1 Translation of attributive clause/phrase and adverbial clause/phrase

In English, the position of the attributive and adverbial clause/phrase is much more flexible than in Chinese, which leads to some difficulties in translation. Let us look at the following examples:

Example 1:

[Original text] After identifying this practice among certain Emberá communities in the areas of Pueblo Rico and Mistrató, UNFPA started an initiative to support the community in an inclusive, participatory process of reflection and dialogue regarding the practice and its implications in order to determine its origins and how best to transform it.

[UN translation] 在查明普韦布洛里科和米斯特拉多地区的某些安巴拉人社区正在实行这一做法之后，人口基金开展了一项举措，在关于这一做法及其影响的包容性参与式反思进程和对话中为社区提供支持，以便确定这一做法的根源，找到转变这一做法的最佳办法。

Without a doubt this is a very long sentence. Its main structure is “UNFPA started

an initiative”, with all the other parts serving as modifiers. The UN translator’s solution to this sentence displays both merits and flaws. The positive side is that most of the attributive and adverbial phrases are broken down into several short units with commas in between when they are translated into Chinese. With the breaks, the Chinese sentence seems to be concise, natural and easy to understand. However, with regard to the translation of the long infinitive phrase “to support the community in an inclusive, participatory process of reflection and dialogue regarding the practice and its implications”, the target text causes some comprehension difficulties. It is very hard for Chinese readers to grasp the main point of this part and to know where they could take a break. Literal translation is not the reason that causes these difficulties. As we can see, the translator changed the order of the sentence and the part of speech of “support” in order to make the target text more “Chinese”. The problem here is that what the translator has done is not enough from a reader’s point of view. It is therefore suggested that the Chinese translation can be improved by adding a punctuation mark “、” between “包容性” and “参与式” and a comma after “对话中” which will function as grammatical hints to help readers to understand the sentence better.

What also needs to be mentioned here is the influence of the original text on the translated text. Although short sentences are encouraged in the guidelines for UN writing, long sentences like this are still very common in UN documentation. To some extent, the translation problem here is partly due to the writing style of the original text which is not sufficiently considerate of the linguistic needs of UN text.

Example 2:

[Original text] The Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, established in accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 5/1 of 18 June 2007, held its sixth session from 30 November to 11 December 2009.

[UN translation] 根据人权理事会 2007 年 6 月 18 日第 5/1 号决议设立的普遍定期审议工作组从 2009 年 11 月 30 日至 12 月 11 日举行第六届会议。

In this example, the postpositive attributive phrase “established in accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 5/1 of 18 June 2007” was translated into a prepositive attributive phrase in the Chinese sentence. Generally speaking, putting the attribute phrase before the headnoun is in accordance with Chinese grammar. In this sentence, however, this general rule is not applicable due to the fact that the attributive phrase is too long and that putting it in a prepositive position leads to imbalance in the sentence. Similar to the last example, what needs to be done here is to orient the translation more towards the target reader by breaking the long sentence into shorter units. The alternative version could be as follows:

“普遍定期审议工作组根据人权理事会 2007 年 6 月 18 日第 5/1 号决议而设立，从 2009 年 11 月 30 日至 12 月 11 日举行了第六届会议。”

Example 3:

[Original text] In light of the above and in light of the actual facts and the reality of the situation on the ground, we believe it is imperative that this trend of distorting the situation on the ground in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the failure to place the situation in the context of occupation in reports by the United Nations, including those of the Secretary-General, must be rectified and

corrected in future reports.

[UN translation] 鉴于上文的陈述，并根据事实和当地局势的现状，我们相信，必须在今后的报告中纠正包括秘书长报告在内的联合国报告歪曲包括东耶路撒冷在内巴勒斯坦被占领土内当地局势的趋势，并纠正在撰写报告时无视“占领”这一背景的做法。

In this example, the “super” long attributive modifying “趋势” is absolutely a trouble maker. The long distance between the verb “纠正” and the objective “趋势” created considerable difficulties for target readers. The reason that leads to this problem is similar to the previous example. That is the attributive phrase that modifies “trend” in the English text was translated into a long attributive in the Chinese text rather than being broken down and translated into adverbial or complement phrases.

From the above analysis, it can be seen that there are two strategies found in UN documentation so far with regard to the translation of attributive and adverbial clause/phrase. One is to integrate a clause/phrase into an attributive which modifies a noun. This approach could produce some good translations which sound natural and are conform with Chinese grammatical requirements. In most cases, however, it leads to a large number of long sentences which are grammatically correct but extremely hard for readers to comprehend. The other strategy is to “translate” them into adverbial or complement phrases in Chinese sentences. By adopting this strategy, long sentences are broken down into several units, which gives the Chinese sentences a sense of rhythm and makes them more reader-friendly and which is, in most cases, a better solution to translating attributive and adverbial clause/phrases.

4.12 Translation of passive voice

Passive voice is widely used in English while Chinese prefers active voice. As a result, most passive voice English sentences will be transformed to active voice when they are translated into Chinese. Consequently, a subject needs to be added if the English sentence does not have one. In UN document translation, however, this practice is not always followed. In some cases, it seems to be a common practice that no subject is added which creates some grammatically incomplete sentences.

Example 4:

[Original text] National plans of action have been elaborated and are being implemented based on treaty body recommendations to implement the recommendations of ...

[UN translation] 按照条约机构的建议，起草了国家行动计划以落实下列机构的建议.....

The subject in the English sentence in passive voice is “national plans”. When this sentence was translated into Chinese, the passive voice was transformed into active voice. As a result, “national plans” became the object in the Chinese sentence. The problem here is where the subject is. Obviously, the Chinese translation omitted the subject because it does not exist in the original English text. However, it made the Chinese sentence incomplete with the absence of a subject. In fact, it can be judged easily from the context that the subject is “the parliament of Uzbekistan”. In general translation contexts, this subject would have been added in its Chinese translation. However here at the UN, translators seem to have been accustomed to this general

practice of omitting subjects.

Of course in some cases, passive voice can directly be translated into “被字句” as long as it sounds natural in Chinese.

Example 5:

[Original text] Slovenia cited the stakeholder summary regarding the situation of Lhotshampas in Bhutan, which stated that those classified as F7 (non-nationals, migrants and illegal settlers) have consistently been denied access to services, including education and health, the right to work and to own property, marry and travel freely.

[UN translation] 斯洛文尼亚援引利益攸关方关于不丹境内的尼泊尔族不丹人处境的概述。概述指出，被分类为 F7(非国民、移民和非法居住者)的人一直被禁止享有包括教育和卫生的各种服务、工作权和拥有财产权以及结婚权和自由旅行权。

Here the passive voice “have been denied” is directly translated into “被禁止” which sounds more natural for Chinese native speakers rather than being transformed into active voice.

It can be concluded from the data that passive voice in the original English text is one of the reasons that lead to grammar mistakes in the translated Chinese text, such as the absence of the subject, although in some cases, this type of grammar mistake has been accepted by UN translators as long as they believe their practice will not hamper readers’ comprehension.

4.13 Translating nouns into verbs

Formal written English uses nouns more than verbs (Gillett, Hammond & Martala, 2009). There are more nominalizations and more noun based phrases (Gillett, Hammond & Martala, 2009). For example, "judgement" rather than "judge", "development" rather than "develop", "admiration" rather than "admire". Needless to say, UN documents are all formal documents; therefore, they are written in formal language and nominalizations are very common in UN files (check the UN GUIDE). Due to this fact, it is very common in UN document translation that nouns are transformed into verbs when they are translated from English into Chinese.

Example 6:

[Original text] (The General Assembly) Noting that interreligious and intercultural dialogue has made significant contributions to mutual understanding, the promotion of a culture of peace and tolerance and an improvement of overall relations among people from different cultural and religious backgrounds and among nations.

[UN translation] (大会) 注意到宗教间和文化间的对话已对相互了解、促进和平文化和容忍以及改善各种不同文化和宗教背景的人民之间和各国之间总体关系作出了重要贡献。

The English text is a typical example of UN writing with two nominalizations -- "promotion" and "improvement". It is acceptable if these two words are translated into nouns literally. However, it can be seen from the UN translation that the translator here has abandoned the acceptable literal solution and changed the nouns into verbs in the Chinese text which makes it conform more closely to the natural way of Chinese writing.

Nevertheless, another problem has arisen due to this nominalization. As we can see, there is another noun phrase -- “mutual understanding” -- before the two nominalized phrases. Here the translator has translated the noun phrase “mutual understanding” as noun phrase -- “相互了解”, which has led to inconsistency of the Chinese text. According to general practice, parallel phrases in Chinese sentences should be consistent and keep the same structure. As the translator has translated the latter two nouns phrases into “verb + object” structure, to keep consistency, he/she should turn the first noun phrase “mutual understanding” into the same structure too, such as “增进相互了解”. But the problem is that, to keep the consistency, the translator has to add a verb like “增进” for this noun phrase because the original English text does not have one. Apparently, the UN translator here failed to do so either because he/she did not notice this problem or because he/she wanted to choose a safer way -- translating “mutual understanding” literally and not to add an extra word to it. To a certain extent, the translator did nothing wrong by truthfully rendering the exact meaning and structure of the original text. The problem with lack of parallel phrasing in the Chinese translation is in fact caused by the lack of parallel phrasing in the original text. However, if we take readers into account, the addition of the verb “增进” is no doubt a better solution.

4.2 Lexical challenges:

4.21 The use of four-word set phrases in Chinese translation

To be honest, initially this researcher believed that it would be very hard to find four-word set phrases in the data set of translated Chinese UN documents. One reason

is that UN documents are supposed to be literal and unembellished. The other reason is that four-word Chinese set phrases have such sophisticated contextual meanings that they are not a wise choice as the substitutes for English words or phrases which have more specific meanings. The results from the data set, however, were the opposite. In the course of data-collecting, a surprising number of four-word set phrases were found in the translated Chinese UN documents. These include phrases such as “东躲西藏” “与世隔绝” “天壤之别” “真名实姓” “蜂拥而至” “付之东流”, to name but a few. The following are a few examples selected to for detailed analysis.

Example 7:

[Original text] Societies differ greatly in their capacity to manage population movements and assimilate migrants, and a capacity adequate to manage moderate and/or gradual flows may be overwhelmed by massive and/or sudden flows.

[UN translation] 不同社会在管理人口移动和使移徙者融入其中的能力方面有天壤之别，而足以管理适度和(或)逐渐流动的能力可能无法应付大量和(或)突然的流动。

In this example, “differ greatly” is translated into “有天壤之别” rather than a more literal translation as “有很大不同”. Is it a good and accurate translation? According to *The Dictionary of Idioms Online*, “天” means “the heaven” while “壤” means “the earth”; therefore, the four-word set phrase “天壤之别” refers to things that are extremely different from each other as one is in the heaven and the other is on the earth. According to *The Dictionary of Idioms Online*, “天壤之别” can be translated into “to be as far removed as heaven from earth; to be vastly different”

“worlds apart” “a whale of a difference”, etc.. It is obvious that “天壤之别” conveys a higher degree of difference compared with “differ greatly”; from this point of view, it is not an accurate translation of the original text. Then why did the translator choose to use “天壤之别” here? One possible explanation is that the translator, out of goodwill, simply wants to make the Chinese translation more lively; but unfortunately, he/she failed to identify the difference between “differ greatly” and “天壤之别” and led to an over-translation. Therefore, it is suggested that “differ greatly” in this sentence should be literally translated into “有很大不同”.

Example 8:

[Original text] After learning that a verdict had been sent to his military unit to execute him, he moved from one place to another in Iraq for three years before he fled the country.

[UN translation] 得知其所在部队收到执行死刑的命令后，他在伊拉克境内东躲西藏，三年后逃往国外。

In this example, “moved from one place to another” is translated into the four-word set phrase “东躲西藏”. Has it reflected the exact meaning of the original text? According to *The Dictionary of Idioms Online*, “东躲西藏” is used to describe someone hiding in one place after another to avoid disasters which conforms to the English text. Thus it is a good translation of the English text, accurate, vivid and much more concise compared with a literal translation like “从一个地方搬到另一个地方”. In this sense, the use of four-word set phrase has realized Nida’s “dynamic equivalence” (Nida, 1964) and reached the goal of complete naturalness of expression

(Munday, 2001).

Example 9:

[Original text] Even assuming that he deserted after three days in Najaf, he would have participated in the indiscriminate bombing of the city.

[UN translation] 即使假设他在纳杰夫三天后离队，他也可能参加了对该市的狂轰滥炸。

In this sentence, “indiscriminate bombing” is translated into the four-word set phrase “狂轰滥炸”. Let us first look at the meanings of “indiscriminate bombing” and “狂轰滥炸” respectively. According to *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* (Pearsall & Hanks, 2005), “indiscriminate” means “done at random or without careful judgement”; while in *The Dictionary of Idioms Online*, “狂轰滥炸” is explained as “bombing madly”. The difference between them is obvious. The English text stresses the random nature of the bombing as well as its lack of discrimination while the Chinese translation focuses on bombing in an insane manner. It can be concluded here that “狂轰滥炸” is a mistranslation of the original text. It is suggested that “indiscriminate bombing” can be translated as “恣意轰炸” which will accurately reflect the meaning of the original text.

From the above analysis, it is evident that using four-word set phrases in Chinese translation has both pros and cons. The positive side of four-word set phrases is that they are vivid, fresh and can give the dull documents a human face. The problematic side is that they often lead to equivalence problems. One of the reasons for this is because set phrases in Chinese usually have extensive connotative meanings, so it is

always more risky to choose Chinese set phrases in translation, especially for UN documents which are extremely sensitive in cultural and political terms. To some extent, it is wiser and safer to avoid using four-word set phrases and translate in a literal way. However, from the practice of UN translators, it seems that they are not afraid of using four-word set phrases; instead, they are trying to use more of them in the English/Chinese translation to polish the target text, although some are successful, some are not.

4.22 How to deal with the “no-equivalent-word” situation

Considering the huge differences between English and Chinese, it often happens that you cannot find an appropriate word in Chinese which is equivalent to the original English word. In this case, a new Chinese word or phrase might appear. Some of these words and phrases then come to be frequently used in Chinese and finally become a common word or phrase of the Chinese language. For instance, “framework” is a word originally used in English UN documents. When “Framework Convention” was translated as “框架公约” for the first time, many Chinese readers felt strange about it. However, as time has passed, it has become widely accepted in the Chinese language (Cao & Zhao, 2006). What is more, many new terms have come up such as “框架协议” “法律框架” “行动框架”, etc (Cao & Zhao, 2006). There are similar examples in the collected data for this paper.

Example 10:

[Original text] civil society

[UN translation] 公民社会 or 民间社会

“Civil society” is a phrase which has appeared in UN documents frequently but is still an unfamiliar concept for Chinese readers. In translated Chinese versions, at least two different translations for “civil society” have been found: one is “公民社会” and the other is “民间社会”. Both of them are the literal translation of “civil society”.

According to Cao & Zhao, in dealing with these “new” words, translators at the UN may first try to find out how many different versions of translation already exist in the media or in other translated documents. Then they will make a comparison and choose the most appropriate version. There are some situations where different translations of a word/phrase exist together for a long period of time (Cao & Zhao, 2006). When necessary, translators will also consult experts in relevant areas about the most accurate translation of certain words/phrases (Cao & Zhao, 2006). With regard to the above example, it is obvious that a consensus on the translation of “civil society” has yet been reached inside the UN. In fact, this reflects the process of the birth of a new word/phrase. As it becomes more and more important and appears more frequently in English UN documents, its translation will eventually become fixed and there is a strong possibility that the translation will become a new Chinese word/phrase widely accepted and well-understood by Chinese speakers. In fact, it can be regarded as a “foreignization” (Venuti,) process that will enrich Chinese and bring new life to this ancient language.

Example 11:

[Original text] Climate change is often viewed as a “threat multiplier”.

[UN translation] 气候变化常常被视为一种“威胁乘数”。

“Threat multiplier” is not a new phrase in English. In Chinese however, it is rarely used and there has not been a fixed Chinese translation of it. Similar to the last example, the translator adopted the literal method in translating this phrase. If this phrase keeps appearing in UN documents with high frequency, it can be projected that its translation could become a fixed term in Chinese just like “framework”.

From the data collected for this paper, it can be seen that UN translators prefer the literal approach when translating English words/phrases which do not have equivalents in Chinese. From this perspective, UN translation plays a significant role in transmitting new concepts, information, knowledge and terminologies (Cao & Zhao, 2006). However, some of these literal translations need further explanation to make them clear to the target readers. For instance, “dignity kits” is translated into “尊严工具包” in UN documents. It would greatly facilitate the understanding of the reader if a note were added to explain what “dignity kits” means.

4.23 Problems in translating proper nouns

Example 12:

[Original text] the Office for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat

[UN translation] 秘书处经济和社会事务部经济及社会理事会支助和协调办公室

In this translation of the proper noun, there is nothing wrong from the perspective of accuracy. The original text is the name of a UN office, a long name. The Chinese translation is also a long name in accordance with the English text. The strategy adopted here is a literal translation. However, any organization names as long as this

will cause trouble for their readers and make the target text unnatural. As we can see, there are some repetitions in both the original and target texts, namely “Economic and Social”. Whether the repetitions should be cut depends on whether the UN wants its documents to be more concise and whether they believe it is an important issue.

In the course of data collecting, another interesting phenomenon has been found; that is, some UN translators chose unfamiliar words/phrases rather than widely accepted words/phrases in translating certain proper nouns. For example, the “Yangtze River” is more commonly known by the Chinese people as “长江”; while in some UN translations, it was translated into “扬子江” which is the ancient name of this mother river of China. The fact is not every Chinese knows that “长江” and “扬子江” actually refer to the same river. The same happens in translating “the United Kingdom”. The United Kingdom is known by Chinese as “英国”; while in most UN documents, it was translated into “联合王国” which makes no sense to most Chinese people. This type of translation can be regarded as certain set norms of UN translation which UN translators are reluctant to break. However, for the readers’ sake, it is better to choose words/phrases that are familiar to the target readers in the translation of such proper nouns.

4.3 Other problems arising from data analysis

4.3.1 Cultural elements

It was assumed prior to this research that culture would be a major issue that affects translation practice, as the UN is one of the most culturally diversified

international organizations. However, the fact is that little material has been found associated with cultural problems in the course of data-collecting. Although a number of different key words highly associated with cultural issues were used in data-collecting, such as “文化遗产” “西藏” “少数民族”, no cultural elements that are related to translation problems were identified. This, to certain extent, shows that the stipulated writing requirements for UN documents – straightforward, short plain words, no colour, no adornment, etc. (United Nations, 1976) -- are implemented well by UN document drafters. This consequently has simplified the work of UN translators.

4.32 Political elements

Different from cultural issues, it is almost impossible to avoid political elements in UN documents as the United Nations itself, by its very nature, can be viewed as a political arena. In English/Chinese translation, for example, one of the unavoidable political problems is the “Taiwan Issue”. As the People’s Republic of China is the only “China” recognized by the UN, it is required that no “中华民国” should appear in any Chinese UN documents (Gu, 2005). Every time when Taiwan is mentioned, it can only be called “台湾地区” (Gu, 2005). According to the data collected for this paper, however, the above principles do not fit.

All together, five different translations of “Taiwan” are found.

Example 13: The Republic of China (Taiwan) – 中华民国 (台湾)

Example 14: Taiwan – 台湾

Example 15: Taiwan Province of China – 中国台湾省

Example 16: The Republic of China on Taiwan -- 在台湾的中华民国

Example 17: The Republic of China on Taiwan -- 中华民国在台湾

From the above examples, it can be seen that how to translate “Taiwan” largely relies on how “Taiwan” is presented in the original English texts. In example 13, the expression “the Republic of China (Taiwan)” comes from the letter of sixteen countries to the Secretary-general arguing for the “fundamental rights of the 23 million people of the Republic of China (Taiwan) to participate meaningfully in the activities of the United Nations specialized agencies”. These are countries which officially recognize Taiwan as a sovereign nation. From the perspective of accuracy, it is the right choice here for translators to translate “the Republic of China (Taiwan)” as “中华民国(台湾)” which reflects the true meaning and intention of the original text. Example 14 is the most common way Taiwan is presented in UN documents. The translation is rather neutral, without specifying whether “Taiwan” refers to a nation or a region. Example 15 comes from quadrennial reports submitted by non-governmental organizations, with both the original text and the translated text consistent with the sovereign claim and foreign policy of the People’s Republic of China. Example 16 & 17 have the same original text but use different translations. Actually, “The Republic of China on Taiwan” is a highly political expression which would be preferred by the former Taiwan “President” Lee Teng-hui due to the fact that “it denotes the Republic of China is in fact a government in exile in Taiwan” (Tsai & Ng). Judging from the data, “The Republic of China on Taiwan” is more commonly translated into “中华民国在台湾” rather than “在台湾的中华民国” in UN documents. However, the first

translation often leads to ambiguity in the context of a whole sentence. For example:

Example 18:

[Original text] We welcome the recent positive developments between the Republic of China on Taiwan and the People's Republic of China.

[UN translation] 我们欢迎最近中华民国在台湾和中华人民共和国之间的积极发展。

There could be two interpretations for the Chinese translation. For readers who know the expression “中华民国在台湾”, they tend to view “中华民国在台湾” as a proper noun referring to Taiwan. For readers who are not familiar with this expression, they may view “中华民国” and “在台湾” as separate phrases. This may lead to some confusion because people may think “中华民国” and “台湾” refer to different authorities in this situation. In this example, the translation of “在台湾的中华民国” is a better choice from the perspective of clear expression.

It can be seen from the above analysis that in practice, due to political reasons, the translation of “Taiwan” cannot be consistent. It varies according to different original texts and generally, a literal method is adopted in its translation.

Another example also shows that the literal approach is a good choice in dealing with politically sensitive translations.

Example 19:

[Original text] The choice of terminology to report deaths on the Palestinian side as “lost their lives” and for the Israeli side as “were killed” may imply to the reader that

the loss of life of the 1,300 Palestinians was simply a result of their own doing without attributing these deaths to a specific action such as killing or military aggression or violence, while it is clearly implied that those on the Israeli side were killed intentionally by the Palestinian side.

[UN translation] 报告巴勒斯坦方面死亡人数使用的措辞“丧生”和针对以色列方面使用的措辞“被杀”，可能向读者暗示 1 300 名巴勒斯坦人丧生仅仅是其自身行为造成的结果，而没有把这些人的死亡归咎于杀害或军事侵略或暴力等具体行动，但是这句话却明确意味着以方人员是被巴勒斯坦方面故意杀害的。

As terminology is the major focus in this example, it is preferable that “lose one’s life” is literally translated into “丧生” and “be killed” is literally translated into “被杀” in order to avoid political arguments from the Palestinian representatives at the UN.

Chapter 5 Conclusions

As laid out at the beginning of this paper, the objective of this research is to find out the problems and challenges that exist in UN English/Chinese document translation so as to work out some solutions for better practice. Through detailed analysis in chapter 4 from grammatical, lexical and other important aspects, the above goals have been partly reached.

This research used primary data in its analysis. Initially, fifty example sentences with different types of problems were selected. Based on preliminary analysis, several categories were established to conduct further analysis on specific examples. The categorization has been proved to be effective as it covered most of the problems arising from the data. Other major problems identified in the course of the data analysis were put into a separate section for discussion. As the research progressed, supplementary data collection was conducted in order to investigate certain problems in greater depth.

Main findings from this research

- ✧ Based on data analysis, three major problems are found in UN English/Chinese translation: 1. readability; 2. incomplete sentence structure; 3. accuracy of individual words/phrases. With regard to improving the readability of UN documents, it is true that many efforts have been made by UN translators to make their translations more readable: the wide use of four-word set phrases is one

example; however, it is also a fact that long and imbalanced sentences are still very common in UN documents. This greatly hampers the readers' comprehension of these documents. The main reason for this poor readability is because the translators fail to choose appropriate translation strategies. As long as suitable strategies are applied, most of the readability problems can be solved. The problem of incomplete sentence structure mainly comes from the lack of a subject which, in turn, is caused by passive voice or the lack of a subject in the original text. However, this kind of incomplete sentence structure seems to have been accepted as a general practice in UN English/Chinese translation as long as the omission does not influence the accurate rendering of meanings. As translation is an "art of regret", it is unavoidable to mistranslate some individual words/phrases. UN document translation is not an exception. However, as important and authoritative as UN documents are, it is the responsibility of translators to minimize mistakes and to make UN documents as accurate as possible.

✧ As a range of different translation strategies are adopted by UN translators including changing the order of sentences, translating nouns into verbs, using four-word set phrases, changing passive voice into active voice and so on, it is hard to say literal translation is still a dominant strategy in UN translation; however, as far as new terminology and politically-sensitive words/phrases are concerned, literal translation remains the translator's first choice.

✧ The quality of Chinese translations is, to some extent, influenced by the quality

and style of the original English texts. The quality and style of English documents vary from one to another, though there exist some general rules for writers to follow. Needless to say, a large number of English documents are drafted by people whose native language is not English. Generally speaking, a clear, succinct, straightforward original text is more likely to produce high quality Chinese translations; while an obscure, tedious English sentence with a complex structure requires more effort in transformation and has a higher chance of resulting in mistakes. From this perspective, UN translation is, in fact, a dynamic process and evolves with the changing of UN's writing styles.

- ✧ It will be of great help to the improvement of UN translation if UN translators move slightly from source text-oriented towards reader-oriented translation. The nature of UN documents determines that UN translation must be source text-oriented to ensure the accurate passing-on of information. However, if translators give readers more consideration in the course of their work, the readability of their translations can be substantially improved without sacrificing the accuracy.

Limitations and future research

The limitations of this research paper lie in the following aspects:

First of all, the research questions are quite broad and general given the size of this paper. As a result, the analysis is necessarily quite shallow as it has to cover many aspects of translation and each aspect can only be given limited space. In future research, the subject could be narrowed down to a specific document type, for

example, resolutions only, or a specific aspect of grammatical phenomenon, for example, the use of four-word set phrases, this should produce more thorough and insightful results in these areas.

Secondly, the quantity of data collected for this paper is rather small. Needless to say, these examples can not cover all the problems existing in UN's English/Chinese translation. The selection of the data is random rather than conducted in a more scientific way. To some extent, this will influence the comprehensiveness of the results. Further research on a larger database could throw new light on these issues and confirm or modify the findings of this thesis.

Thirdly, given the fact that previous research on UN translation is very limited, this paper lacks a strong theoretical basis for its discussion on practical issues.

To sum up, translation research in big organizations like the UN is of great importance and value in terms of practical application. It is hoped that the discussion of grammatical and lexical problems in UN English/Chinese document translation in this paper could make UN translators more aware of their existing problems and attract more translators and theorists to pay attention to this topic and conduct further research on it. In this way, document translation theories could be developed and in turn serve translation practice.

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